REMARKS

OF

MR. SIMMONS, OF RHODE ISLAND,

IN SUPPORT OF HIS PROPOSITION TO

REDUCE POSTAGES TO A UNIFORM RATE OF FIVE CENTS FOR A SINGLE LETTER, FOR ALL DISTANCES.

Delivered in Senate of the United States, Thursday, February 6th, 1845.

Mr. President: Exhausted, as I know the members of the Senate are, by the discussion of the numberless propositions to amend the bill before us which have been presented, I must, nevertheless, beg their attention for a few moments to the one I have offered. I do this from a belief that in the fate of this proposition is involved the success of all plans of reducing postages to a rate satisfactory to the people, without throwing this department of the public service upon the general Treasury for permanent support.

All agree that the income of the Post Office Department is at present inadequate, and is annually diminishing; something must therefore be done, or its efficiency will be gone.

In order to sustain it, we must change the present rates of postage, or make immediate and annual appropriations from the Treasury. A conviction of this fact, induced your committee to present the bill before us. That bill proposes to reduce the rates of letter postage to five cents for distances under one hundred miles, and to ten cents for greater distances. The amendment now pending, proposes a uniform rate for all distances of five cents.

One question presented is, whether or not the reduction to ten cents for distances over one hundred miles, will remove one of the difficulties in our way, which is the interference of private mails or expresses in the business of letter-carrying, and the consequent reduction of our receipts.

The chairman of the committee has, in very able and repeated arguments, endeavored to prove that this rate of ten cents would insure sufficient revenue, if interference by private carriers can be prevented, and also to con-

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vince us that the penal enactments contained in the bill will accomplish this last object. In this I am constrained to disagree with him. I have no faith in the sentiment that you can prevent the people of this country from employing such of their own citizens as will do their work the cheapest, by a system of prosecutions such as this bill contemplates; and I should have *no* favor for it, if I thought it would produce that result.

I believe the right, and the only practicable way to *command* business sufficient to support the Post Office Department, is to do it *better* and *cheaper* than individuals can. This the Government can afford to do, and is in my judgment *bound* to do. The power to establish a mail was conferred on the Government in this expectation, and for this purpose. It was not given to enable the Government to make exorbitant charges for the service, much less to enable it to enforce a compliance with them if made. I think the existing charges for letter-carrying are of this character; and I am not disposed to denounce all who afford, or who employ, other means of communication than the United States mail. I believe that the rate in the bill before us, of ten cents, is too high, and therefore will fail to accomplish the object desired and intended. This will be apparent to the Senate from a single and simple illustration. It requires as much as, or more, to be paid for the carriage of a letter from Albany to New York, than the ordinary freight of a barrel of flour by the same channel of communication. The disparity in the service is so obvious, that you cannot prevent or control the opinion that such a charge is unreasonable; and if you pass the bill with this high rate, the people will continue to remonstrate and petition for reduction. If further reduction is refused, they will, in greater numbers than at present, leave your mail and seek other modes of conveyance. They may regret this, but they will submit to "the necessity that impels them to the separation." No man can expect any thing else who knows the history, or can appreciate the character of this people.

The Post Office Department is at present without adequate means, because it has not the public opinion in its favor. This will continue as long as the cause of it is allowed to remain; and after the passage of this bill, as well as now, unless our postage is as low as that of individual carriers. Our object should be to regain the good opinion and business of the public. To do this, we must meet their wishes so often expressed in petitions and resolutions from State legislatures. Does any one doubt that, with the reduction to five cents proposed in the amendment, the United States mail will have the letter-carrying of the country? It is a little less than is charged by

competitors; and there are other advantages that would give the regular mail the preference at the rates charged by others.

The Senator from Pennsylvania said yesterday that he was in favor of low postage, but was for a *prudent* course, and was opposed to a greater reduction than to ten cents at one step. It appears to me that this is a case where a bold step is the only one which can be successful. A prudent course demands an *effectual* reduction—one that *will* secure the business to our mail. Can we hope to do this by reducing our charge for letter-carrying from three-fold, as it now is, to double the rates charged by our competitors, as he proposes? Individuals have not succeeded in taking the business from the mail by such a course; they underbid to get business, and do the same to regain it when lost. It is a new idea that this may be easier done by a *prosecution* for *penalties*, as this bill contemplates. Nobody should expect to succeed in getting custom for the mail by *prosecuting* or *persecuting* the people whose support it wants. There are obvious reasons against trying such an experiment.

The only objection to a reduction which all admit will secure the business, is, that it will throw the Department on the Treasury for support. Those who urge this, are forced to confess that it don't support itself now, that its revenues diminish annually, and that a reduction which shall not secure the business will still more embarrass it; therefore, with no reduction, or with but an inadequate one, the Department must be supported from the Treasury, if sustained at all. To persist then in our present system, or to make but a partial reduction, will accomplish none of the objects which we desire and propose. We shall neither *satisfy* the *public*, nor relieve the Treasury.

The reduction which I propose, will certainly accomplish one of them. It will satisfy the public and regain the business. Of this there can be no doubt, for all the petitions and resolutions before us ask for reduction, and very many of them for a uniform rate of postage. Whether or not, it will also accomplish the other object, that of obtaining sufficient revenue to sustain the Department, cannot be seen so clearly beforehand. It must remain to be proved by trial. But we are not without the means of forming an opinion upon this branch of the subject. These means are afforded us, by the trial of low postage in England, and upon this experiment I rely for a demonstration that the proposed reduction to five cents will enable the Department eventually to sustain itself, without aid from the Treasury.

By the report of our Postmaster General upon this subject, it appears :—

That the annual income of the Post Office of England, is in round numbers, (in dollars,) - - - -	$7,860,204
From which I deduct the postage received upon foreign letters, the expense of these being paid for by the Admiralty on about seven millions letters, at the usual rate of postage of one shilling and 4*d. is* - - - - -	$1,990,311
Leaving for the income on *inland* postage - - .	$5,869,893
The expenses of the Department are - - -	4,739,129
Showing an annual profit from a penny rate of postage, which is the present English rate for all distances, of - -	$1,130,664

This is the result in England, where the cost of the Department is greater than ours, taken from facts officially before us.

This result in England leads us very naturally to enquire, if similar results are not to be expected from a reduction of postage in this country. To ascertain this, we must institute a comparison between *our* Department and theirs.

The expenses of our Post Office Department are about	$4,250,000
In this is included the cost of transporting public documents and other printed matter for the various Departments and for Congress, making at least - - - - -	250,000
Leaving for the expense incurred in the service of the people generally - - - - - - -	$4,000,000

If the same results accompanied a reduction of postage in this country as in England, would the postage received defray the expenses of the Department? This is a question of arithmetic, and is easily answered.

If a population of twenty-eight millions (that of England,) at a penny postage for all distances, yields a revenue of $5,868,892, what will a population of twenty millions (that of the United States,) yield at the same rate? The answer is $4,192,780—this gives a sum greater than is needed to m[illegible] expense by near two hundred thousand dollars, at a penny stirling, or two cent rate of postage. A single other consideration once satisfactorily settled, and all difficulty will disappear. Do the motives for extensive correspondence exist to the same extent in this country, as in England? This inquiry involves an extensive range of subjects—such as the general character of the two people, their habits, education, business, intercourse, ability from the general dis-

tribution of means, &c., some of which I have taken pains to examine, but none of which do I propose to trouble the Senate with, because we have facts for our guidance upon this, as well as the preceding branch of the subject, a *trial* in both countries instead of one. The returns of the number of paying letters which passed through the mail in this country in 1836, (before private mails interfered,) was about thirty millions. The number of free letters is about three millions, making thirty-three millions. Our population may be stated to have been at that period fifteen millions. Then, if a population of fifteen millions under a high rate of postage, send thirty-three millions of letters, what would be an equal portion for a population of twenty-eight millions of people? The answer is, sixty-two millions. This agrees within a fraction of the number sent in England, as we are informed.

This examination establishes these two propositions. First, that when the rates of postage were high in both countries, the correspondence was as great here as in England, according to the number of people, the number of letters in each country being the same in proportion to their respective population. Second, that if a reduction of postage to two cents in this country should increase correspondence and the business of our mail in the same ratio that a reduction to a penny sterling has increased that of England, we could pay the expenses of the Department at the reduced rate, (of two cents,) and have an annual surplus of two hundred thousand dollars. So confident am I, that like causes produce like results, that I for one would not hesitate to make the reduction at once to two cents, if I could be assured of as fair a trial, and for the same time (five years,) as in England, and without a doubt of the same result. But the amendment offered does not propose so large a reduction; (with the present views of Senators, it would be useless to offer such a proposition;) I do not, therefore, expect so great an increase in the correspondence here, as has taken place in England, although I believe, that we have all the same strong motives for it, if the same time and circumstances were given to bring them into action. But I do expect a sufficient increase to meet the expenses of the Department, in less time than has transpired in England. The increase necessary to effect this is not so great as many seem to suppose; it is but about one-sixth the increase which has taken place in Great Britain, provided we secure to the United States mail the carriage of letters, of which no one can doubt.

It has been already stated, that to meet expenses, there must be collected from letters and printed matter four millions of dollars annually. We have received heretofore half a million only from newspapers, &c.; which leaves three and a half millions to be supplied by letter postage. From the re-

ported speech of the chairman, (from which many of the facts I rely upon are taken,) it appears that the number of letters which would now pass through the post office, according to the number paying postage in 1836, with our present population, is forty-two millions. Add to this those which have heretofore gone free, and are now to be paid for by the different departments, &c., viz: three millions, and we have forty-five millions without any increase from reduced rates of postage.

It requires an increase upon this number, of little more than fifty per cent., to give seventy millions; which, at five cents, will yield the amount required, three and a half millions.

The increase from the reduction in England has been about three hundred and fifty per cent. Can there be reasonable doubt that the increase will be *one-sixth* as great here as it has been there, from a similar cause?

In the correctness of all the data on which these estimates are made, I have the admission of the honorable Senator from Maryland, chairman of the committee, who also yields his assent to the fairness of the conclusions resulting from them; but he does not agree to the amendment from an over caution. This, I think, will be destructive, if the amendment should not prevail. There are other facts presented by our returns, which should give confidence of greatly increased correspondence among our people with low postage. I refer to the number of letters which passed through the mail the last year, at the two lowest rates of postage, embracing letters carried not exceeding eighty miles.

An examination will show that, as the number of square miles embraced in a circle, with a diameter of one hundred and sixty miles, bears to the square miles in the inhabited parts of the United States, so is the proportion of those who can correspond at the two lowest rates of postage, to the whole number of persons in the country; estimating the number as if equally distributed over those parts of the country which are settled, and have mail accommodation.

For, as these circuits surround every one of the fourteen thousand post offices in the country, those containing the people who can communicate with each other by letter, at the low rate of postage, comprehend sparsely as well as thickly settled portions of the country, and make, in the aggregate, an average of about twenty-five to the square mile.

The two lowest rates include letters sent not exceeding eighty miles, and embracing, at any and every post office, all within a circuit of that distance, or one hundred and sixty miles in diameter, and containing an area of less than twenty thousand square miles; which, at twenty-five to the mile, con-

tains a population of half a million—being, of a population of twenty millions, one-fortieth part. So that, for every person who can be corresponded with, at these two low rates of postage, there are forty who cannot. Yet we find by the returns that there are annually transmitted through the mails about ten millions of letters at these two low rates of postage, which would give four hundred million for the whole country, if the correspondence were as active among all our people as with those living within the distance of 80 miles. This is nearly double the number of those which pass through the mail in Great Britain.

This exposition at once indicates the obstacles which prevent active correspondence among our citizens. They are distance and expense; and these, combined. How far each, of itself, forms an obstacle, we have no means to ascertain. We have seen the effect in England of reducing the expense in the exhibits presented—the ingenuity of man has not yet overcome the other, but is fast approaching it. We have it in our power to remove one of the obstacles here, and place our people in as favorable a position, in respect to the expense, as others. The amendment proposes an approach to it. It must, of course, be borne in mind, that distance is and will continue a great obstacle to correspondence. People have not the same acquaintance with their fellow-countrymen living remotely, as with those who are near them, and, therefore, have not the same occasion for correspondence. The same is true in England, where letters have so greatly increased by reducing postage. And although it would not be to the same extent there, under similar circumstances, the country not covering so great a surface; yet the difference in this respect is more than counterbalanced by the difference in the habits of the two people. There, the population is more fixed —the people are born, brought up, and die, without scarcely leaving the small tract of land they cultivate. Here, it is quite different. Parents are now living, whose children were the pioneer settlers of the West, where States have grown up, teeming with millions, and outnumbering the "Old Thirteen." The intimate relations between such a people will produce a greater correspondence, according to their numbers, than among those brought into comparison—a circumstance which should give confidence in our expectations of an increased correspondence.

There are various other points of view in which this question has presented itself, which have been equally convincing, that a reduction to this point is safest in reference to the ultimate ability of the Department to sustain itself.

But, sir, suppose I am mistaken in all these estimates—suppose that no

increase takes place in the letter correspondence of the country, in consequence of this reduction of postage; that some fifty or sixty millions of letters is all that will be written, whatever be the rate of postage. What is it our duty to do upon that supposition? We certainly should endeavor to carry what are written. If we do not, the establishment will devolve on the Treasury for nearly the whole of its expenses, or it must go down entirely. Letter-carrying is the only portion of its business that pays cost now; and this will be profitable at the rate proposed. Prudence, therefore, dictates that we should secure the carriage of these. Can you expect to do this and retain the rate of ten cents, now proposed to be stricken out?

Three-fourths the letters now carried in the mail, within distances subject to this ten cent rate, by the present bill, can be, are offered to be, and are, carried by private mails at six cents. Can you hope to regain the business, and charge nearly double? Do you expect to induce people to patronize your mail by commencing prosecutions against them? If an individual should propose to do any such thing, he would be thought a fit subject for a mad-house. Why should the Government charge more than others, for doing such service? I agree that the Government should have the preference, at a fair price, and insist that it can afford to carry cheaper than individuals.

A brief examination of the elements of cost to this Department will enable us to judge with more accuracy as to the propriety of different rates of postage.

The cost of the mail service of the United States is, in round numbers, four and a quarter millions of dollars—estimated at one-fourth of a million for the service done for the various departments of Government, and four millions for that done for the people generally.

This four millions is made up of the cost of office-service one million, and for transportation three millions. There is carried in the mail about thirty millions of letters, and about fifty-six millions of newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, &c. Suppose we divide the expense for office service equally between the letters and printed matter, and the transportation, according to the amount of each, carried in the mail. It costs an average of about six cents per pound for transportation in the mails. The account stand thus:—

Expense of transporting thirty millions letters, at a weight of one-third of an ounce each, making five-eighths of a million pounds, at six cents per lb., is - - - - - -	$375,000 00
Add half the expense of office service, which is -	500,000 00
Making, for office service and transportation, - -	$875,000 00

Expense for the transportation of fifty-six millions newspapers, pamphlets, &c., at an average weight of one and a quarter ounces each, making four and three-eighths million lbs., at six cents, amounts to - - -	$2,625,000 00	
Add half the expense of office service, -	500,000 00	
		3,125,000 00
In all, - - - - - - - -		$4,000,000 00
The receipts of the Department are—		
For postage on letters, (exceeds,) -	$3,500,000 00	
" on printed matter, - -	500,000 00	
		4,000,000 00

These are about the sums in round numbers; and they show that the letters yield a profit of 400 per cent., and that the expense of carrying the printed matter is 625 per cent. greater than we receive for it; furnishing proof that the charge for letter postage is twenty-five fold greater in proportion than for newspapers, pamphlets, &c.: an inequality and injustice which should create astonishment that it is submitted to at all, rather than that it is complained of so much by the people.

This is a view which should surprise us that any portion of the letter carriage is retained, rather than that so much of it goes by private expresses, who can carry for half our charges, and then make a profit of two hundred per cent.

Take a single view of the practical effects of the bill we are considering, with the rate of postage proposed of five cents, and see if there is reason to regard the reduction as too great, or to apprehend that carrying letters will be unprofitable, and thereby throw the expense for that part of the service upon the Treasury.

I will take the number of letters now sent by public and private conveyance, based upon the actual number carried in the United States mail in 1836, together with those hitherto free, without any addition from the anti-[illegible]ncrease from a reduction of rates.

This will give forty-five million of letters. The increase will, to a small extent, change the relative weight of the letters and printed matter—for which it may be proper to add to the cost of carrying the letters, one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, and to that extent reduce the cost of transportation of printed matter, (the whole cost of transportation remaining the same.) With these alterations the account will stand in this way:

For Letters.

Transportation of forty-five million letters, $\frac{1}{3}$ oz. each, 15-16ths of a million pounds - - - - -	$500,000
Add half of office service - - - - -	500,000
Total cost,	$1,000,000
Amount of postage on 45,000,000 letters, at 5c. - -	2,250,000
Excess of receipt over cost on letters,	$1,250,000

A profit of one hundred and twenty-five per cent. on the cost.

Printed matter.

Expense of transporting 56,000,000 papers, pamphlets, magazines, &c., averaging $1\frac{1}{4}$ oz. each—(many are put into the mail wet)—$4\frac{3}{8}$ million pounds - - - -	$2,500,000
Add half of office service - - - - -	500,000
Total cost,	$3,000,000
Amount heretofore received for postage on printed matter -	500,000
Showing an excess of cost over the receipts of	$2,500,000
From which deduct the profit on letters - - -	1,250,000
Which shows, without any increase from a reduction of postage, an aggregate deficiency of - - - -	$1,250,000

But should it be insisted that the expense ought to be equally divided between the written and printed matter, notwithstanding the disparity in weight, call each of these two millions.

It will be seen that the postage on letters exceeds the sum thus assumed as the cost by $250,000; showing a profit on that part of the service of $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., and a loss on the papers of one and a half million.

From these views it appears that, however divided, the deficiency upon an estimate, without any increase of the number of letters from a [illegible] of postage, is one and a quarter million, requiring, to enable the Department to meet all its expenses, an increase of a little more than fifty per cent. on the letters, or twenty-five million letters.

This is but one-sixth the increase in England, and not so much as was mated the other day by the Senator from New Hampshire, (Mr. Woodbury,) who stated, that in his opinion the increase would be thirty millions

on account of the reduction. *With* this increase the Department will have a surplus.

But suppose there should be no increase. We have seen that all the deficiency is caused by the carriage of newspapers, pamphlets, &c., at less than it costs. The loss on this branch of the service has not been complained of by any one. There is no design to diminish this or any other part of the mail service; but a general wish, in which I participate, to see its usefulness extended. But is it proper to burthen the *social and business correspondence* of the country with the loss sustained in disseminating information over the country? We cannot do this if we would; unless by severe enactments we suppress all competition in the profitable part of the service—letter carrying. For at higher rates than that now proposed private expresses will underbid us.

What useful results can be expected by imposing burthens upon letter correspondence to enable us to make up our loss in the carriage of newspapers? Is not the intercourse of affection and enterprise, conducted by letters, as much the object of regard for statesmen as the circulation of newspapers? I think it is. For, much as I respect the character and usefulness of many of these, I cannot forget that in some I have seen of late there is evidence that a sort of *deleterious oxyde* comes off from the types, which is calculated to poison the fountains of social life! No such injurious effects come from letter writing. If there be motives for incurring this expense and loss to the Department, by the circulation of newspapers from the geographical extent of our country, there are still stronger ones for the encouragement of friendly correspondence among our people. I was struck with the remarks made a day or two since by the Senator from Arkansas, who sits near me, that the danger of this country was not from without, but within its borders, from the extent of the country and the remote situations of its people. It was the considerations here suggested that created apprehensions for the duration of our Union in the minds of the early patriots of the country. Our geographical position—States separated from each other by mountains—the natural tendency to division and separation—all require powerful counteracting influences to preserve us a nation. Such influences are to be found in [illegible]tercourse of our people—that sort of intercourse which engages the heart and keeps up the connection between mind and mind through the medium of good offices, not only by acts of personal kindness, but such as are carried on by epistolary correspondence among acquaintances, and those connected by affection or kindred, or the relations of business. The influence of all these is *indispensable* to keep us a united people. It is, therefore, an important object to remove the obstacle which *expense* interposes to their active operation. They

form not only the happiest, but the *strongest* ties, by which families—society—the Union itself—is held and bound together. Let no man suppose that the expense forms no barrier to the interchange of these friendly offices among the people of this country. Rather let him reflect that *it now costs the value of a bushel of wheat* for a person in Illinois or Indiana to get a letter from a friend or relative in the Eastern or Southern States; and a bushel of wheat is regarded among us as the value of *a day's work for a man.* The consciousness that such is the expense cannot fail to deter many from writing letters; and in that way, and from that cause, correspondence ceases—acquaintance is dropped—and our people become separated in feeling. But remove the expense, and you *revive* the intercourse; and the recollections it will bring with it will become more endeared by both the distance and time that has intervened.

Suppose, sir, that the obstacles to intercourse, now interposed by distance and expense, were both removed; that by the use of some such means as are afforded by the magnetic telegraph, every parent who had a child away from the family could inquire of their welfare, and receive at once an answer. What mother is there who would not send to her child a message at the dawn of every morning?

With these facilities, there would constantly circulate a current of affection through every inhabited portion of this extended country, producing such harmony as has not been witnessed by created beings since "the morning stars sang together."

By reducing postage, we approximate this result; could it be fully realized it can hardly be told how trifling a charge upon each communication would pay the expense of our present establishment. We are called upon by constant applications from the people to try to effect a reduction. Why should we refuse to comply?

We carry printed matter low, and there has been no complaint—all perceive that in this there is a common benefit—but they cannot desire that this shall injure any other branch of the service, thus producing equal or greater benefits. It appears to me, that the proper course is to put letter postage at as low or lower rates as others charge—and apply the profits of this branch of the service to the payment of the general expenses of the Department—so long as there is any profit, no one will have a right to complain, if that profit is not quite sufficient to pay all the loss incurred by disseminating intelligence among the whole people.

The immediate question before us then, involves the inquiry whether it is best to make a partial, or an effectual reduction at once? I think it must

be manifest that to make only a partial reduction would only diminish the revenue, because a partial reduction will *not* command the business. We are now fast losing the letter carriage, which *alone* pays the expense incurred; while an effectual reduction will regain the lost business, and an increase of that which is profitable will *promise*, at least, adequate support. If we do *nothing* or act *inefficiently*, we cannot *hope* for it. The proposition is to have one rate for all distances. This system being *national* in its object—it appears to me the rate should be uniform—giving in comparison to the old system the greatest stimulus to correspondence among the most distant. It also removes an objection to the bill as it now is, which is, that a much greater number can correspond with each other, at the low rate, in the densely populated portions of the country, than in those *not* so. The single rate places all upon an equality; so that, in reference to the benefits it confers, we are *one people*.

The present is a favorable time to make this alteration. The two political divisions in the country are each represented by a majority in the two Houses. If the trial is not a successful one, the responsibility will be divided. If it shall succeed, (as I have no doubt it will,) and shed its blessings upon, and give satisfaction to all parts of our country, the gratification this will afford will be shared alike by the two parties; and ample will it be for us all.